



**Kernos**

Revue internationale et pluridisciplinaire de religion  
grecque antique

**24 | 2011**  
**Varia**

---

## Michèle DAUMAS, L'or et le pouvoir. Armement scythe et mythes grecs

Yulia Ustinova

---



**Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/kernos/1978>

ISSN: 2034-7871

**Publisher**

Centre international d'étude de la religion grecque antique

**Printed version**

Date of publication: 1 January 2011

Number of pages: 345-349

ISSN: 0776-3824

**Electronic reference**

Yulia Ustinova, « Michèle DAUMAS, L'or et le pouvoir. Armement scythe et mythes grecs », *Kernos* [Online], 24 | 2011, Online since 17 October 2011, connection on 20 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/kernos/1978>

---

parcours (p. 214) : « Les conclusions auxquelles nous avons abouti comportent, bien entendu, une part d'incertitude, qui va même s'accroissant, comme il est naturel, au fur et à mesure que l'on remonte plus haut dans le temps. » On ne peut qu'appeler de ses vœux la découverte d'une inscription attestant l'existence de *Narkittia* (p. 178), à l'instar des *Hyakinthia* de Sparte, qui donnerait une indication positive en faveur de la reconstruction ainsi opérée. Pourtant, une telle trouvaille – n'en déplaise au dieu des épigraphistes de la page 108... – laisserait toujours dans l'ombre la complexité de fêtes et de rituels dont aucune trace d'étiologie ou de contenu n'a été conservée. Le paradigme de la fertilité/fécondité est ici assumé dans toutes ses implications (mort prématurée, renaissance miraculeuse au printemps suivant, comme les bulbes du narcisse et de l'hyacinthe [p. 217]), mâtiné du paradigme sociologique des « rites de passage », le tout décliné sous la forme évolutive d'une fête de la belle saison qui, avec la formation de la cité, assume l'intégration des jeunes gens dans le corps civique. Posons le problème par l'absurde : que n'aurait-on pu écrire sur l'Érechthée athénien si l'on n'avait conservé que le nom de la tribu qu'il patronnait et les fragments de la tragédie éponyme d'Euripide, sans aucun autre témoignage sur la richesse des traditions mythiques et des rituels de la cité ?

L'exposé est dépourvu de notes, mais des indications bibliographiques très fournies et argumentées sont rassemblées à la fin de chaque chapitre. Le livre se referme sur un appendice qui publie et étudie les monuments chorégiques au cœur de l'enquête.

Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge  
(F.R.S.-FNRS – Université de Liège)

DAUMAS Michèle, *L'or et le pouvoir. Armement scythe et mythes grecs*, Paris, Presses universitaires de Paris Ouest, 2009. 1 vol. 21,5 × 28 cm, 206 p., 16 pl. ISBN : 978-2-84016-042-7.

The book by Michèle Daumas (M.D.) focuses on nine mid-fourth-century BC sheet-gold decorations which were created to cover wooden-and-leather cases of six *gorytoi* (bow and arrow cases) and three sword scabbards. Eight among them were unearthed in several tumuli in the Northern Black Sea area, and one was discovered in Macedonia. These nine objects are usually treated together, as a corpus of gold artifacts belonging to ceremonial sets of Scythian weapons and produced by Greek artisans.<sup>1</sup> The book is well produced, illustrated with sixteen color plates and 81 line drawings, and includes three maps. The text is accompanied by a glossary, a bibliography and indices of museums, ancient sources, ancient proper names, and place names. The table of contents is very detailed and allows easy orientation in the text.

The work is arranged into parts in accordance with the scenes depicted on the objects. Four *gorytoi*, from Chertomlyk, Ilyinty, Melitopol, and Five Brothers (Pyatibratni), feature the first scene; three scabbards, from Chertomlyk, Five Brothers, and Chaian, present the second subject; and finally two more *gorytoi*, from Karagodeouashkh and from Tomb II at Vergina, are decorated with the third pattern of relief. This division reflects the approach of the A. who is interested primarily, or perhaps almost exclusively, in the mythological contents of the relief representations, which are discussed in minor details.

M.D. outlines her views on the subject in the Introduction: contrary to the modern tendency to regard artifacts as historical documents, rather than just beautiful objects, and in particular to look for indigenous connections of Scythian weaponry, she revives the attitude current in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and calls for a 'retour à l'explication des images par les textes' (p. 12). This methodology is a drawback to a research aiming at understanding of people and cultures that produced and used art objects. However, the book suffers from an additional

---

<sup>1</sup> D. WILLIAMS, J. OGDEN, *Greek Gold. Jewelry of the Classical Period*, New York, 1994, p. 176.

weakness. The texts available to the author are Greek, and throughout the book she reveals no acquaintance with the literature and folklore of the Iranian-speaking peoples cognate with the Scythians.<sup>1</sup> M.D. also takes no notice of the major part of the intensive modern research on their archaeology and culture, not only the Russian works by D. Rayevsky and S. Bessonova (she admits no knowledge of Russian, p. 13), but also the research by G. Dumézil and A. Khazanov, to mention only a few most prominent names.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the artifacts are “read” only from the point of view of their Greek creators, whereas the problem of their “reading” by the non-Greek customers is not even put forward.

M.D.’s choice of methodology is especially deplorable since the objects of art treated in the book did not arrive in the steppe sites by chance. The scabbards are intended for short swords used by Iranian-speaking warriors, from Scythians to Persians, known as *akinakai*. *Gorytoi* belonged *par excellence* to the armor of the nomads of the steppe, and appear on numerous objects of art originating from the area dominated by the Scythian culture, including the plate belonging to the headdress of a woman interred in the Karagodeouashkh tumulus (pl. 13-3). Thus, the *gorytoi* and scabbards discussed in the book were manufactured by Greek artisans purposely for the Scythian elite, according to Scythian preferences. Even purely Greek images, when found in Scythian or Sindo-Maeotian archaeological contexts, appear to connote local mythological characters.<sup>3</sup> Scythians were able to recognize their mythological figures in Greek images.<sup>4</sup> Archaeological contexts, if they had been addressed, could allow further insights into the symbolism and function of the ceremonial weapons and their decorations. Thus, *interpretatio Scythica* of the Greek images could not only shed light on important aspects of Scythian culture, but also give a clue to a better understanding of the way the Greek artisan worked, for instance, by means of his choice of subjects intended to please the indigenous clientele.

The first part of the book starts with a discussion of the four *gorytoi* of the so-called “Chertomlyk type”. Their sheet-gold decoration comprises a scene involving twenty characters, vegetal friezes, scenes of fight between carnivorous and herbivorous animals, and between griffins. The attitudes and actions of all these are analysed in minor detail, with extreme attention to every tiny difference in execution between the four objects. The interpretation of the scene in the upper register by M.D. is based on its identification by C. Robert in 1889 as an illustration of an episode in the *Cypria*, telling the story of the stay of Achilles on Scyros and the arrival of Diomedes and Odysseus there. Taking into account the more recent research, scrutinizing subtle hints at relations between the *dramatis personae* and their characteristics, and comparing the relief on the *gorytoi* with Greek works of art in different media, M.D. suggests a convincing reading of the main scene, including a persuasive identification of most figures. She connects the parts of the two registers into a narration of Achilles’ *res*

---

<sup>1</sup> In fact, dubbing all the Iranian peoples of the Black Sea area “Scythians” is inexact. In the seventh-third centuries BC Scythian tribes lived in the country from the modern Dniester to the Don, including the Crimea, that is, in the South Russian (or more accurately, mainly Ukrainian) steppe. The area of the Kuban River in the North Caucasus and the Taman peninsula belonged primarily to the Maeotians, who were of either Thracian, Iranian, or aboriginal Caucasian stock; the Maeotians had been subdued by the Sindians, in all probability of Scythian origin, so that tribes living in this area are frequently grouped together as Sindo-Maeotians: T. SULMIRSKI, T. TAYLOR, “The Scythians,” *CAH* 3.2 (1991), p. 555-560, 572. Thus, the tumuli treated in the book are located in the Scythian area, but for Karagodeouashkh which lies in the country of the Sindo-Maeotians.

<sup>2</sup> D.S. RAYEVSKIY, *Model' mira skifskoy kul'tury* [The World Model of the Scythian Culture], Moscow, 1985; S.S. BESSONOVA, *Religioznye predstavleniya skifov* [Religious Notions of the Scythians], Kiev, 1983; G. DUMÉZIL, *Romans de Scythie et d'alentours*, Paris, 1978; A. KHAZANOV, *Nomads and the Outside World*, Cambridge, 1984.

<sup>3</sup> BESSONOVA, *o.c.*, p. 163-167, 173-177.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, numerous gold pendants in the form of Medusa’s head trimmed the garments of noblemen buried in Scythian tumuli. The vogue for these Greek depictions of Medusa might have resulted from the Scythian identification of Medusa with their anguipede goddess: Y. USTINOVA, *The Supreme Gods of the Bosporan Kingdom. Celestial Aphrodite and the Most High God*, Leiden, 1999, p. 111.

*gestae*, and ingeniously proposes to regard the two groups in the lower frieze as complimentary to the upper. In her opinion, a scene in the palace of Lycomedes is continued by two scenes at Aulis, of Iphigenia's arrival there and of Telephus' healing by Achilles with rust from his lance, to complete the story of the events before the departure to Troy. On the basis of her analysis, M.D. demonstrates that several, rather than single, dies were utilized by the artisan or artisans who created the four gold reliefs (p. 42).

As to the *akinakai* scabbards, M.D. suggests that their reliefs depict the battle on the Caicus in Mysia where Telephus was wounded, rather than an unidentified illustration to the Iliad or a battle between Persians and Greeks, as many thought before. Given the fact that in the Chertomlyk tumulus the *gorytos* and the scabbard were discovered together, the thematic connection of their decorations is tempting; in this way, the two objects would form a real set. Although the attitudes of the characters hardly allow their confident identification, and the hero regarded by M.D. as Telephus is wounded in his right hip, rather than in the left one, as Telephus should be, the interpretation of the story of the scabbards as belonging to the same narration as that of the *gorytoi* seems probable.

These interpretations deal with the Greek mythological background of the story and the goldsmith's artistic and technical sources. Yet the representations on the *gorytoi* and the *akinakai* scabbards,<sup>1</sup> manufactured exclusively for the Scythian market, must have been meaningful from the point of view of the Scythians, who used them in various ceremonies, during the lifetime and after the death of their owners. M.D. admits this idea in principle (p. 111), but does not pursue it. She tries to explain the focus of the reliefs on Achilles by the popularity of his cult among the Greeks, in Olbia and on the Isle of Leuka, and connects the oracle of Apollo which instructed Telephus about the way to be healed from his wound, with the cult of Apollo Iatros in the Ionian colonies of the Black Sea littoral (p. 112-114).<sup>2</sup> In so doing, M.D. remains in the Greek world, whereas the princely weapons she discusses belonged to Scythians and were discovered in Scythian tombs. In fact, local traits in the Greek cult of Achilles Pontarches are proposed by some authors,<sup>3</sup> and it has recently been argued that Apollo Iatros comprised features of a local deity or deities.<sup>4</sup> However, M.D. does not attempt the crucial step, which would be a research into indigenous cults and myths that could lead the Scythians to recognize familiar characters in Achilles and other characters depicted on the *gorytoi* and the *akinakai* scabbards.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The latter must have been especially important, since the sword, and weapons in general, were worshiped by many Iranian-speaking nomads, including the Scythians (Hdt., IV, 62; BESSONOVA, *o.c.*, p. 48-50).

<sup>2</sup> Several investigations of these cults in Western languages were published during the recent decades: for Achilles Pontarches see H. HOMMEL, *Der Gott Achilleus*, Heidelberg 1980; J. HUPE (ed.), *Der Achilleus-Kult im nördlichen Schwarzmeerraum vom Beginn der griechischen Kolonisation bis in die römische Kaiserzeit*, Rahden (Westfalen), 2006 (*Internationale Archäologie*, 94); for Apollo Iatros see Y. USTINOVA, "Apollo Iatros: A Greek God of Pontic Origin," in K. STÄHLER, G. GUDRIAN (eds.), *Die Griechen und ihre Nachbarn am Nordrand des Schwarzen Meers*, Münster, 2009 (*Eikon*, 9), p. 245-298.

<sup>3</sup> As early as in 1826 H.K.B. Köhler suggested that Greek colonists worshiped a local deity as Achilles: "Mémoire sur les îles et les courses consacrées à Achille dans le Pont Euxin," *Mémoires de l'Académie des sciences de St-Petersburg* 10 (1826), p. 106; M.I. Rostovtzev associated the cult of Achilles in Olbia with the Thracian horseman: *Skylthien und der Bosphorus*, Berlin, 1931, p. 4; V. D. BLAVATSKIY, "The impact of the Classical culture on the Northern Black Sea area," *Sovietskaya Archeologia* 2 (1964), p. 18-19; 4 (1964), p. 29, in Russian; S.B. OKHOTNIKOV, A.S. OSTROVERKHOV, *Snyatilshche Akhilla na ostrove Levke* [The Sanctuary of Achilles on the Isle of Leuke], Kiev, 1993, p. 70-102; Y. SHAUB, "Achilles the god of the Black Sea area," *Nory chasovoy* 13/14 (2002), p. 356-367, in Russian, and other scholars admit the existence of indigenous elements in the cult of Achilles in the Ionian colonies on the Pontus.

<sup>4</sup> USTINOVA, *The Supreme Gods...*, *o.c.*

<sup>5</sup> Scythian perception of artifacts manufactured by the Greeks is a subject of numerous works. For instance, D. RAYEVSKIY, *o.c.*, p. 170) argues that it was the warlike character of Achilles that attracted the Pontic barbari-

Furthermore, K. Stähler suggested an appealing interpretation of the scenes on the Chertomlyk-type *gorytoi* as illustrating the story of a marriage of a local princess and therefore a succession myth.<sup>1</sup> Since all the characters wear Greek outfit, it seems scarcely possible that the artisan represented this very myth. However, a combination of the two interpretations is seducing: the Greek goldsmith had in head Achilles' deeds, whereas his Scythian customer perceived the scene as representing a story familiar to him. In this case, the scabbards would be considered as depicting a battle between the Scythians and the Greeks (as K. Stähler proposes), a subject that was doubtlessly very popular among the Scythians. As mentioned above, such *double entendre* can be traced in the Scythian archaeological record. It's a pity that M.D. rejects K. Stähler's interpretation of the scene on the *gorytoi* without discussion (p. 27).

The second part of the book deals with two *gorytoi* of Karagodeouashkh type, found in the Karagodeouashkh tumulus in the northern Caucasus and in Tomb II in Vergina. The main scene on these two gold sheets depicts a battle, which M.D. interprets as a pillaging of the Cabiric sanctuary in Thebes by Thersander, rather than Ilioupersis, as suggested by many other authors. The identification is based mainly on the shape of one object, which M.D. defines as a crowned *pilos* above a jar, associated with the mysteries of the Cabiri at Thebes (p. 135).<sup>2</sup> This is a plausible hypothesis, given the central position of the jar with the *pilos* in the composition.

In the interpretation of these objects, M.D. modifies her approach, and takes into account the archaeological context associated with the tombs, but goes astray in her attempt to establish connections between the buried persons and the Cabiric mysteries. She supports her interpretation of the scene on the *gorytoi* with a hypothetic identification of Tomb II at Vergina as containing the remains of Philippos II, who as a youth spent some time in Thebes as a hostage, and – another hypothesis! – could be initiated into the mysteries – but there is no evidence that he was. This concentration of hypothetic suggestions is methodologically unsound and scarcely persuasive. Moreover, the *gorytos* from Vergina was manufactured for the Scythian, rather than Macedonian market: the Macedonians did not use *gorytoi*. The *gorytos* from Tomb II must have been a gift or a part of spoils, and M.D. lists several events which could possibly bring this Scythian object to Macedonia (p. 150-153). In any case, the subject of the decoration was designed for the Scythians, and its compliance with the religious beliefs of the Macedonian ruler interred in Vergina is therefore unlikely.

The attempt to connect the two persons buried in the Karagodeouashkh tumulus with the Greek cult of the Cabiri is no less far-fetched. The images on the rhyton and the plate from a hair-dress decoration, discovered in the tumulus, undoubtedly belong to the realm of Scythian (precisely, Sindo-Maeotian) imagery,<sup>3</sup> and contrary to the opinion of M.D. have nothing in common with the Cabiric iconography. M.D. cites testimonies to the existence of the cult of the Cabiri in Phanagoria, Olbia, and Istros, but these are Greek cities, and the adoption of Greek cults by the indigenous elite of the Kuban area remains to be proved. Thus, in the second part of her book M.D. proposes an interesting interpretation of the iconography of the

---

ans, and allowed them to compare his image on the *gorytoi* to their first king Colaxais, whose legend is narrated by Herodotus (IV, 5).

<sup>1</sup> K. STÄHLER, H.-H. NIESWANDT, "Der skythische Goryt aus dem Melitopol-Kurgan," *Boreas* 14/15 (1991/2), p. 85-108.

<sup>2</sup> M.D. pays much attention to the frieze featuring water-fowl, and connects it with the the Boeotian Cabiri, but these are in fact very common on objects of art from the Scythian realm, including the silver rhyton from the Karagodeouashkh tumulus, where the *gorytos* was discovered. For the interpretation of this image see: D. RAYEVSKIY, *Ocherki ideologii skifskikh plemen* [Essays on the Ideology of the Scythian Tribes], Moscow, 1977, p. 59-60.

<sup>3</sup> Both have been discussed in countless works, for partial bibliography see USTINOVA, *The Supreme Gods...*, *o.c.*, p. 123-127, 264-269.

two *gorytoi* from the Greek point of view, but hardly persuades in her attempt to relate their subject with the religion and culture of either the Macedonians or the Scythians.<sup>1</sup>

The title of the book promises to tell the reader about gold and power, Scythian weaponry and Greek myths. The main problem of the book is that it keeps half of the promise: gold objects and Greek myths are treated at length and in a convincing manner, but Scythian weapons and the power they conferred on their owners remain far away from the author's attention.

Yulia Ustinova

(Ben-Gurion University of the Negev)

John BODEL, Mika KAJAVA (éds), *Dediche Sacre nel mondo greco-romano. Diffusione, funzioni, tipologie/Religious Dedications in the Greco-Roman World. Distribution, Typology, Use. Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, American Academy in Rome, 19-20 aprile 2006*, Roma, Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2009. 1 vol. 20 × 27 cm, 420 p. (*Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae*, 35). ISBN : 978-88-7140-411-0.

Les dédicaces constituent un ensemble de documents à la fois considérable et très intéressant pour l'étude des systèmes religieux antiques, dans la mesure où elles offrent une voie d'accès privilégiée pour comprendre les relations qui s'établissaient entre les acteurs du culte et les divinités honorées. Toutefois, ce matériel n'a guère reçu jusqu'à présent toute l'attention qu'il aurait mérité dans la recherche moderne, sans doute justement en raison de son ampleur et de sa diversité<sup>2</sup>. On ne peut donc que saluer l'initiative qui a vu naître le présent ouvrage, issu d'un colloque organisé à Rome en 2006 par l'Institut finlandais et l'Académie américaine, et consacré au thème des dédicaces dans les mondes grec et romain. Les quatorze contributions qu'il comporte sont agencées de manière thématique en cinq parties (*Concetti e definizioni, Regolamentazione, Luoghi e contesti, Pratiche*, et *Dediche mute*) et sont suivies de précieux indices (*locorum*, prosopographique et général). Étant donné l'orientation de la revue *Kernos*, ce compte rendu se concentrera principalement sur la partie « grecque » de l'ouvrage, se contentant d'évoquer simplement les études concernant le monde romain.

En guise d'introduction, J. Bodel (*'Sacred dedications': A problem of definitions*) propose une réflexion méthodologique sur le concept des dédicaces sacrées, et sur les difficultés suscitées par leur définition et leur classification. Il définit la dédicace comme « a particular type of gift offering to a divine or supernatural being, one of three basic means, along with sacrifice and prayer, by which the Greeks and Romans established and sustained good relations with their gods ». Il distingue ainsi la dédicace de la prière en ce que la première est une « action whereby goods are transferred from mortals to transcendent recipients », et du sacrifice par sa « quality of durability » (p. 19). Parmi les questions abordées, J.B. propose en outre un développement intéressant sur la distinction entre espace physique et espace religieux dans la pratique dédicatoire, arguant que la localisation de l'objet – qu'il soit placé dans un espace sacré ou non – importe moins que l'action de la consécration en elle-même et l'intention qui la sous-tend.

<sup>1</sup> For a very interesting "double reading" of the decoration of these two *gorytoi*, both from the Greek and the Scythian point of view, see K. STÄHLER, "Zum Gorytreilief aus dem sog. Philippsgrab in Vergina," in *id.* (ed.), *Zur grieco-skythischen Kunst*, Münster, 1997 (*Eikon*, 4), p. 85-114.

<sup>2</sup> Voir toutefois, pour le monde grec, l'étude de M.L. LAZZARINI, *Le formule delle dediche votive nella grecia arcaica*, Roma, 1976; F.T. VAN STRATEN, « Gifts for the Gods », in H.S. VERSNEL (éd.), *Faith, Hope and Worship. Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World*, Leiden, 1981 (*Studies in Greek and Roman Religion*, 2), p. 65-151; et récemment, l'introduction de R. PARKER de l'article « Greek Dedications », dans le *ThesCRA I* (2005), p. 278-281.